

A couple weeks ago I was in a local supermarket buying just a few things. It was Saturday morning, so it was busy. As I came up to the check-stands I saw there were long lines, but there were the self-checkout stations . . . Now, I never use these because I suspect the technology will defeat me. Machines hate me, and I hate them – they can sense that, so I know that when I use that self-check thing I'll blow it, looking clueless until some 16-year-old bagger comes to recuse me.

But this time I saw a person leaving the self-check and I thought, "What the heck, live dangerously." So up I went up to the free machine. But just as I got to it I felt a hand on my shoulder and a man's voice from behind. "The line starts back there." And I turn around and see the sign in the middle of the aisle saying. "The line starts here."

The man didn't do anything wrong. He used a neutral voice. Now, he could have been nicer, "Excuse me, but there is a line. You just must not have seen it." He could have been worse. "Hey, idiot, are you blind? Get in line!" He was neither. He just stated the facts. And I didn't do or

say anything wrong either. I immediately recognized the situation and just said, "Sorry," and headed for the line.

But here's why I remember this incident. Even though I didn't act out sinfully, deep in my heart there was a little bit squeak of anger. It was partly due to hurt pride at being made to look a little silly in public. But it wasn't only the public part. That guy had implied I had done a wrong. How dare he! My reaction wasn't rational, but it was real. Pride dies so hard! I don't like being told I've done something wrong.

When I read these words of Jesus in the Gospel today I tend to identify with the person trying to reconcile the sinner. Maybe that's because I do have to tell people of their sins sometimes and it's never easy, so Jesus' words are a call to do the job and not remain in cowardly silence. But today I want to identify with the sinner who is told he's sinning. That's really hard to hear. I don't even like to be told I unintentionally jumped line in a grocery store. Think what I'm like when I have sinned and my conscience bothers me, and someone calls me on

it. But Jesus is telling us in this passage that we need to be able, both to speak this truth to our brothers and sisters who are sinning, and be able to listen humbly when we ourselves are warned.

Notice what this passage tells us about Jesus' idea of the Church and the public nature of sin. Some people ask why we Catholics go to a priest for confession. Isn't my sin just between me and God? No, actually, it isn't. My sin hurts other people. Every person's sins hurt the whole Body of Christ. The priest listens and speaks, not only as Christ in the sacrament, but for that community.

This passage also shows that when we hear Jesus say, "Do not judge," He doesn't mean we shouldn't call out sin. Jesus Himself says, "If [your brother] refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or tax collector." Why is Jesus so seemingly harsh and judgmental towards people who sin? For their own souls, but also for the sake of the unity of the People of God. Sin separates and divides us from one another. But note: the discipline Jesus commands is only

for those who refuse to acknowledge their sins and won't try to change. Jesus loves us and knows our weaknesses. The Good Shepherd will go anywhere to help us if we're trying to leave sin behind. But towards those who deny they are even doing anything wrong -- He is firm.

And here I want to come to another point this passage brings out – the Church as an institution, following Jesus' direction, must discipline her members who sin. There are times the Catholic Church in her Pope, bishops, priests must teach and preach this or that action is sinful – and that there will be consequences if the persons sinning don't change. And nobody likes to hear this. I don't. You don't. It's difficult to hear another person tell us we're doing something wrong, even a little thing.

But for the sake of the unity and health of the community, sin must be called out and corrected, or the sin spreads and hurts more, and more, souls. Think even about that man in the grocery store. He could have let me cut line. That would have been humble, and maybe the best course of action – if he had been alone. But what about the

other people in line behind him? There was a community aspect to his action. If the man had let everybody cut line, then the rest of the line gets restless and angry. The system breaks down and there is greater stress and more bad feelings.

Being members of the Catholic Church is still challenging two thousand years later. We still need to listen to Jesus' advice about dealing with our sins. We're still a Church of both saints and sinners. Let us examine ourselves. Is someone in our life today warning us that we are sinning – we're doing something wrong? Maybe we should listen to them more closely, and do some deep thinking about it, rather than assume we're in the right. Jesus calls all of us "Brothers" in His teaching. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault . . . If he listens you have won over your brother." We're to challenge and hear one another from a place of family love – not anger, or a sense of moral superiority and power. Our calling one another to live out the

gospel must always be done humbly and be directed towards our living
in better unity with Christ, which is their happiness and ours.